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ATENT COOPERATION TREATY

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PCT

NOTIFICATION OF TRANSMITTAL OF
INTERNATIONAL PRELIMINARY EXAMINATION
REPORT

(PCT Rule 71.1)

To: WATERMARK PATENT & TRADEMARK ATTORNEYS Locked Bag 5 HAWTHORN VIC 3122		
Date of mailing day/month/year 27 JAN 2005		
Applicant's or agent's file reference P22215PCAU		
International Application No. PCT/AU2003/001637	International Filing Date 8 December 2003	Priority Date 6 December 2002
Applicant KINETIC PTY LIMITED et al		

IMPORTANT NOTIFICATION		
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1. The applicant is hereby notified that this International Preliminary Examining Authority transmits herewith the international preliminary examination report and its annexes, if any, established on the international application.
2. A copy of the report and its annexes, if any, is being transmitted to the International Bureau for communication to all the elected Offices.
3. Where required by any of the elected Offices, the International Bureau will prepare an English translation of the report (but not of any annexes) and will transmit such translations to those Offices.

4. REMINDER

The applicant must enter the national phase before each elected Office by performing certain acts (filing translations and paying national fees) within 30 months from the priority date (or later in some Offices)(Article 39(1))(see also the reminder sent by the International Bureau with Form PCT/IB/301).

Where a translation of the international application must be furnished to an elected Office, that translation must contain a translation of any annexes to the international preliminary examination report. It is the applicant's responsibility to prepare and furnish such translation directly to each elected Office concerned.

For further details on the applicable time limits and requirements of the elected Offices, see Volume II of the PCT Applicant's Guide

Name and mailing address of the IPEA/AU AUSTRALIAN PATENT OFFICE PO BOX 200, WODEN ACT 2606, AUSTRALIA E-mail address: pct@ipaaustralia.gov.au Facsimile No. (02) 6285 3929	Authorized officer ZBIGNIEW BIELAWSKI Telephone No. (02) 6283 2218
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PATENT COOPERATION TREATY
PCT
INTERNATIONAL PRELIMINARY EXAMINATION REPORT
(PCT Article 36 and Rule 70)

Applicant's or agent's file reference P22215AUP1	FOR FURTHER ACTION	See Notification of Transmittal of International Preliminary Examination Report (Form PCT/IPEA/416).
International Application No. PCT/AU2003/001637	International Filing Date (<i>day/month/year</i>) 8 December 2003	Priority Date (<i>day/month/year</i>) 6 December 2002
International Patent Classification (IPC) or national classification and IPC Int. Cl. 7 B60G 21/06		
Applicant KINETIC PTY LIMITED et al		

1. This international preliminary examination report has been prepared by this International Preliminary Examining Authority and is transmitted to the applicant according to Article 36.
2. This REPORT consists of a total of 4 sheets, including this cover sheet.
 This report is also accompanied by ANNEXES, i.e., sheets of the description, claims and/or drawings which have been amended and are the basis for this report and/or sheets containing rectifications made before this Authority (see Rule 70.16 and Section 607 of the Administrative Instructions under the PCT).
These annexes consist of a total of 29 sheet(s).
3. This report contains indications relating to the following items:
 - I Basis of the report
 - II Priority
 - III Non-establishment of opinion with regard to novelty, inventive step and industrial applicability
 - IV Lack of unity of invention
 - V Reasoned statement under Article 35(2) with regard to novelty, inventive step or industrial applicability; citations and explanations supporting such statement
 - VI Certain documents cited
 - VII Certain defects in the international application
 - VIII Certain observations on the international application

Date of submission of the demand 4 June 2004	Date of completion of the report 20 January 2005
Name and mailing address of the IPEA/AU AUSTRALIAN PATENT OFFICE PO BOX 200, WODEN ACT 2606, AUSTRALIA E-mail address: pct@ipaaustralia.gov.au Facsimile No. (02) 6285 3929	Authorized Officer ZBIGNIEW BIELAWSKI Telephone No. (02) 6283 2218

INTERNATIONAL PRELIMINARY EXAMINATION REPORT

International application No.
PCT/AU2003/001637

I. Basis of the report

1. With regard to the elements of the international application:*

the international application as originally filed.

the description, pages , as originally filed,
pages , filed with the demand,
pages 1-20, received on 21 December 2004 with the letter of 20 December 2004

the claims, pages , as originally filed,
pages , as amended (together with any statement) under Article 19,
pages , filed with the demand,
pages 21-29, received on 21 December 2004 with the letter of 20 December 2004

the drawings, pages 1/5-5/5, as originally filed,
pages , filed with the demand,
pages , received on with the letter of

the sequence listing part of the description:
pages , as originally filed
pages , filed with the demand
pages , received on with the letter of

2. With regard to the language, all the elements marked above were available or furnished to this Authority in the language in which the international application was filed, unless otherwise indicated under this item. These elements were available or furnished to this Authority in the following language which is:

the language of a translation furnished for the purposes of international search (under Rule 23.1(b)).

the language of publication of the international application (under Rule 48.3(b)).

the language of the translation furnished for the purposes of international preliminary examination (under Rules 55.2 and/or 55.3).

3. With regard to any nucleotide and/or amino acid sequence disclosed in the international application, the international preliminary examination was carried out on the basis of the sequence listing:

contained in the international application in written form.

filed together with the international application in computer readable form.

furnished subsequently to this Authority in written form.

furnished subsequently to this Authority in computer readable form.

The statement that the subsequently furnished written sequence listing does not go beyond the disclosure in the international application as filed has been furnished.

The statement that the information recorded in computer readable form is identical to the written sequence listing has been furnished

4. The amendments have resulted in the cancellation of:

the description, pages

the claims, Nos.

the drawings, sheets/fig.

5. This report has been established as if (some of) the amendments had not been made, since they have been considered to go beyond the disclosure as filed, as indicated in the Supplemental Box (Rule 70.2(c)).**

* Replacement sheets which have been furnished to the receiving Office in response to an invitation under Article 14 are referred to in this report as "originally filed" and are not annexed to this report since they do not contain amendments (Rules 70.16 and 70.17).

* Replacement sheets which have been furnished to the receiving Office in response to an invitation under Article 14 are referred to in this report as "originally filed" and are not annexed to this report since they do not contain amendments (Rules 70.16 and 70.17).

** Any replacement sheet containing such amendments must be referred to under item 1 and annexed to this report

INTERNATIONAL PRELIMINARY EXAMINATION REPORT

International application No.
PCT/AU2003/001637

V. Reasoned statement under Article 35(2) with regard to novelty, inventive step or industrial applicability; citations and explanations supporting such statement

1. Statement

Novelty (N)	Claims 1-33	YES
	Claims	NO
Inventive step (IS)	Claims 1-33	YES
	Claims	NO
Industrial applicability (IA)	Claims 1-33	YES
	Claims	NO

2. Citations and explanations (Rule 70.7)

Novelty (N) and Inventive Step (IS) Claims 1-33

Claims 1-33 meet the criteria set forth in PCT Article 33(2) for novelty. The prior art published before the priority date does not disclose a damping and stiffness system for a vehicle suspension system as defined in claim 1 wherein the weight of the vehicle is primarily supported by the vehicle resilient support means.

The claimed invention is not obvious in the light of any of the cited documents nor is it disclosed in any obvious combination of them. It is also considered that it would not be obvious to a person skilled in the art in the light of common general knowledge either by itself or in combination with any of these documents.

Appended claims 2-33 add further features to those defined in claim 1 and are therefore also novel and inventive.

INTERNATIONAL PRELIMINARY EXAMINATION REPORT

International application No.

PCT/AU2003/001637

VIII. Certain observations on the international application

The following observations on the clarity of the claims, description, and drawings or on the question whether the claims are fully supported by the description, are made:

1. Claim 3 is not clear because I cannot find an antecedent to the "modal stiffness volumes" (line 2-3) when the claim is appended to Claim 2. Only "modal resilience volumes" are defined earlier.

1 JC20 Rec'd PCT/PTO 03 JUN 2005

HYDRAULIC SUSPENSION SYSTEM

The present invention is directed to a suspension system for a vehicle, the suspension system providing at least roll stiffness and having independent control of heave, roll and pitch damping.

5 There are known many alternative interconnected suspension systems which have the ability to passively differentiate between different modes of wheel motion with respect to the vehicle body and therefore provide a variety of alternatives in functionality. For example, the applicant's US patent numbers 6,010,139 and 6,270,098, details of which are incorporated herein by reference, 10 provides a pressure balancing "load distribution" unit between two pairs of diagonally interconnected double acting wheel rams. This system provides different heave, roll and pitch stiffness rates with zero warp stiffness and different damping rates in all four base suspension modes (heave, roll, pitch and warp). This system supports the weight of the vehicle, so as the loads on the vehicle 15 change, or as the fluid temperature changes, the volume of fluid in each of the six volumes in the system must be adjusted. Also, as the six volumes in the system can in some load conditions, all be at different pressures, there is the possibility for fluid to leak across seals, which also requires fluid volume adjustments to be made to maintain the correct vehicle attitude. This requires a high pressure fluid 20 source, sensors, control electronics and valves, making the cost of the system relatively high for a passive system. Furthermore, the high pressure used in these systems can result in problems with stationary friction or "stiction" within the load distribution unit and wheel rams.

An example of a passive system providing high roll stiffness with low warp 25 stiffness and negligible heave stiffness and providing high roll damping with lower, more comfortable and isolating heave damping can be found in the applicant's PCT/AU00/00312. As the system does not provide significant heave stiffness, separate support springs are required.

An example of a system having just roll and/or pitch damping can be found 30 in Yamaha's US patent number 5,486,018 and Kayaba's US6,024,366. The system in these documents uses a device between a pair of wheel damping rams, each wheel damping ram having a damper valve in its piston to provide double-acting damping but make the ram single-acting (ie there is only fluid port).

The device provides for independent levels of damping for in-phase (ie heave) and out of phase (ie roll and/or pitch) motions. However this system does not provide significant stiffness in any mode, so in addition to the need for support springs, generally anti-roll bars will be required for a good balance between

5 bounce and roll stiffness. Additionally, as the wheel rams are effectively single acting (having only one fluid port) the amount of damping that the device can provide is limited. There are improvements made to the system to combat this problem, which can be found in Japanese patent office publication number 11291737, but these add more plumbing and spool valves.

10 It is therefore an object of the present invention to provide a hydraulic system for a vehicle suspension that overcomes at least one of the problems of the above described systems, the hydraulic system providing roll stiffness, roll damping, pitch damping and optionally pitch stiffness, all of which can be preferably designed and tuned independently from each other to enable

15 optimisation of each parameter.

With this in mind, according to the present invention there is provided a damping and stiffness system for a vehicle suspension system for a vehicle, the vehicle including a vehicle body and a first pair and a second pair of diagonally spaced wheel assemblies, the first pair of diagonally spaced wheel assemblies

20 including at least one front left wheel assembly and at least one back right wheel assembly, the second pair of diagonally spaced wheel assemblies including at least one front right wheel assembly and at least one back left wheel assembly, the vehicle suspension system also including front and rear vehicle resilient support means between the vehicle body and the wheel assemblies for resiliently

25 supporting the vehicle above the wheel assemblies, the damping and stiffness system including:

at least one wheel ram located between each wheel assembly and the vehicle body, each ram including at least a compression chamber;

30 a load distribution unit interconnected between the compression chambers of the front left, front right, back left and back right wheel rams, the load distribution unit including first and second piston rod assemblies, first, second, third and fourth system volumes and first and second modal resilience volumes,

the first piston rod assembly defining first, second, third and fourth effective areas, the second piston rod assembly defining fifth, sixth, seventh and eighth effective areas, the first and second piston rod assemblies being located within the load distribution unit such that each piston rod assembly can rotate about and
5 slide along a major axis of the piston rod assembly,

the first effective area defines a movable wall of the first system volume such that as the first piston rod assembly slides along its major axis, the volume of the first system volume varies, the second effective area defines a moveable wall of the second system volume, the third effective area defines a movable wall
10 of the first modal resilience volume, the fourth effective area defines a movable wall of the second modal resilience volume, the fifth effective area defines a movable wall of the third system volume such that as the second piston rod assembly slides along its major axis, the volume of the third system volume varies, the sixth effective area defines a moveable wall of the fourth system
15 volume, the seventh effective area defines a movable wall of the first modal resilience volume, and the eighth effective area defines a movable wall of the second modal resilience volume,

the first system volume increasing in volume proportionately to the decrease in volume of the second system volume with motion of the first piston
20 rod assembly, the third system volume increasing in volume proportionately to the decrease in volume of the fourth system volume with motion of the second piston rod assembly,

the volume of the first modal resilience volume decreasing proportionately to the increase in volume of the first and third system volumes with motion of the
25 first and second piston rod assemblies, the volume of the second modal resilience volume decreasing proportionately to the increase in volume of the second and fourth system volumes,

the first and fourth system volumes being connected to the compression chambers of the wheel rams associated with one of the pairs of diagonally
30 spaced wheel assemblies, the second and third system volumes being connected to the compression chambers of the wheel rams associated with the other pair of diagonally spaced wheel assemblies, the damping and stiffness system thereby providing substantially zero warp stiffness; and

wherein the vehicle is primarily supported by the vehicle resilient support means.

Because the damping and stiffness system is not required to be the primary support for the vehicle, relatively low pressure fluid can be used in the 5 system. This reduces or eliminates problems associated with stiction. Furthermore, the use of vehicle resilient support means, which are separate from the damping and stiffness system, provides some warp stiffness which can help to improve vehicle stability under certain conditions.

The load distribution unit may include a first pair of axially aligned primary 10 chambers and a second pair of axially aligned primary chambers, each primary chamber including a piston separating each primary chamber into two secondary chambers, a first rod connecting the pistons of the two first primary chambers, forming a first piston rod assembly and a second rod connecting the pistons of the two second primary chambers forming a second piston rod assembly,

15 one of the secondary chambers in the first pair of primary chambers being a first front system chamber and being connected to the compression chamber of a front wheel ram on a first side of the vehicle,

the other secondary chamber in the first pair of primary chambers which varies in volume in the same direction as the first front system chamber with 20 motion of the first piston rod assembly, being a first back pitch chamber,

one of the secondary chambers in the first pair of primary chambers which varies in volume in the opposite direction as the first front system chamber with motion of the first piston rod assembly being a first back system chamber and being connected to the compression chamber of a back wheel ram on a first side 25 of the vehicle,

the other secondary chamber in the first pair of primary chambers which varies in volume in the same direction as the first back system chamber with motion of the first piston rod assembly, being a first front pitch chamber

30 one of the secondary chambers in the second pair of primary chambers being a second front system chamber and being connected to the compression chamber of a front wheel ram on a second side of the vehicle,

the other secondary chamber in the second pair of primary chambers which varies in volume in the same direction as the second front system chamber

with motion of the second piston rod assembly, being a second back pitch chamber,

one of the secondary chambers in the second pair of primary chambers which varies in volume in the opposite direction as the second front system
5 chamber with motion of the second piston rod assembly being a second back system chamber and being connected to the compression chamber of a back wheel ram on a second side of the vehicle,

the other secondary chamber in the second pair of primary chambers which varies in volume in the same direction as the second back system chamber
10 with motion of the second piston rod assembly, being a second front pitch chamber; and

the first and second front pitch chambers being interconnected forming a front pitch volume and the first and second back pitch chambers being interconnected forming a back pitch volume.

15 Alternatively, the load distribution unit, may include a first pair of axially aligned primary chambers and a second pair of axially aligned primary chambers, each primary chamber including a piston separating each primary chamber into two secondary chambers, a first rod connecting the pistons of the two first primary chambers, forming a first piston rod assembly and a second rod connecting the
20 pistons of the two second primary chambers forming a second piston rod assembly,

one of the secondary chambers in the first pair of primary chambers being a front left system chamber and being connected to the compression chamber of a front wheel ram on a left side of the vehicle,

25 the other secondary chamber in the first pair of primary chambers which varies in volume in the same direction as the front system chamber with motion of the first piston rod assembly, being a first right roll chamber,

one of the secondary chambers in the first pair of primary chambers which varies in volume in the opposite direction to the front left system chamber with
30 motion of the first piston rod assembly being a front right system chamber and being connected to the compression chamber of the other front wheel ram on a right side of the vehicle,

the other secondary chamber in the first pair of primary chambers which varies in volume in the same direction as the front right system chamber with motion of the first piston rod assembly, being a first left roll chamber,

5 one of the secondary chambers in the second pair of primary chambers being a back left system chamber and being connected to the compression chamber of a back wheel ram on the left side of the vehicle,

the other secondary chamber in the second pair of primary chambers which varies in volume in the same direction as the back left system chamber with motion of the second piston rod assembly, being a second right roll chamber,

10 one of the secondary chambers in the second pair of primary chambers which varies in volume in the opposite direction as the second front system chamber with motion of the second piston rod assembly being a back right system chamber and being connected to the compression chamber of a back wheel ram on the right side of the vehicle,

15 the other secondary chamber in the second pair of primary chambers which varies in volume in the same direction as the back right system chamber with motion of the second piston rod assembly, being a second left roll chamber; and

20 the first and second left roll chambers being interconnected forming a left roll volume and the first and second right roll chambers being interconnected forming a right roll volume.

25 The wheel rams may all be single-acting. Any single-acting rams should ideally use two chambers with damping in the piston of the ram to provide good control of rebound damping forces. It can be preferable, on vehicles with extreme roll moment distributions, to use double-acting rams on the end of the vehicle requiring the high roll stiffness and single-acting rams on the other end of the vehicle. Therefore the wheel rams at one end of the vehicle may include a rebound chamber, the rebound chamber of each wheel ram at one end of the vehicle being connected to the compression chamber of the diagonally opposite 30 wheel ram (at the opposite end and on the opposite side of the vehicle).

However, on vehicles with more even roll moment distributions, the widest range of performance is achieved using double-acting wheel rams for all wheels. Therefore each wheel ram includes a rebound chamber, the rebound chamber of

each double-acting wheel ram being connected to the compression chamber of the diagonally opposite wheel ram.

To enable the vehicle to move in the heave direction, resilience is required in the stiffness and damping system. This resilience may come partially or even 5 wholly from the fluid used. However it is preferable for additional resilience to be added, since damping of this additional resilience enables some degree of modal damping. Therefore the compression chamber of each wheel ram may be in fluid communication with a respective accumulator.

The front pitch volume may be connected to the back pitch volume through 10 a pitch valve arrangement. When fluid flows through the pitch valve there is no pitch stiffness provided by the stiffness and damping system, only some pitch damping, partially controlled by any damper valve in the pitch valve arrangement. For maximum comfort it may be advantageous to have no damping in the pitch valve arrangement in some conditions.

15 The front pitch volume may be connected to a front pitch accumulator through a front pitch damper valve and the back pitch volume may be connected to a back pitch accumulator through a back pitch damper valve. If no pitch valve is used, or if it is closed, the front and back pitch accumulators provide additional pitch resilience in the stiffness and damping system.

20 The pitch valve arrangement may include a controlled variable damper valve. Alternatively the pitch valve arrangement may include a passive damper valve. Alternatively or additionally, the pitch valve arrangement may include a lockout valve to isolate the front pitch volume from the back pitch volume. The pitch valve arrangement may include valves which are actuated in response to 25 any or all of longitudinal acceleration, throttle position sensor or switch, brake position sensor or switch, vehicle speed, pitch velocity and/or acceleration signals, front and rear vertical accelerometers, or wheel position sensors.

A roll valve may be provided to interconnect the two front compression chambers and or a roll valve may be provided to interconnect the two back 30 compression chambers. These roll valves remove some or all of the roll stiffness and damping of the stiffness and damping system, thereby improving comfort when the vehicle is travelling in a straight line. The valve(s) can therefore be controlled to be open during straight line running and closed during cornering or

when the surface requires more roll stability from the suspension system. The valve(s) may be actuated in dependence on any or all of steering angle, steering rate, vehicle speed, lateral acceleration, roll velocity or acceleration signals, left and right vertical accelerometers, or wheel positions.

5 As the support means are the primary support for the vehicle body, all four system chambers (front left, front right, back left and back right) can have the same static operating/precharge pressure. Also, as the system contains hydraulic fluid and gas, both of which expand with increasing temperature, a pressure compensation arrangement is required in order to maintain the system
10 static pressure and roll stiffness within a design range over the design temperature. This pressure compensation arrangement can also be used to compensate for any fluid loss over time. Therefore a pressure maintenance device can be connected to each of the four system chambers by respective valves. Additionally, the pitch chambers can have the same operating/pre-charge
15 pressure as each other and even optionally, the same pressure as the system chambers. Therefore, at least one pitch chamber may be connected to the pressure maintenance device through a valve. The valves between the pressure maintenance device and the pitch chamber(s) can be simple restrictions, preferably including filters on both sides of each restriction. Alternatively they
20 may be any other type of valve such as a solenoid actuated valve, although to prevent sudden motions of the vehicle on opening of such valves, a restriction would ideally be included.

The pressure maintenance device can be a simple accumulator. Alternatively it can include a fluid pressure source and regulate to a preset
25 pressure. The fluid pressure source may be a pump and a tank and accumulator may be included. Alternatively, the fluid pressure source may be a conduit from another fluid pressure source on the vehicle, such as power steering, brakes, etc.

The preset pressure that the pressure maintenance device regulates to may be a fixed pressure (ie using a pressure relief valve to cold circuit fluid or a
30 pressure switch). Alternatively the preset pressure that the pressure maintenance device regulates to may be varied as a result of operator input (to switch or control stiffness), as a function of vehicle load, as a function of system temperature, or a combination of any or all of the above.

The pressure maintenance device may include first and second output pressure conduits, the system chambers being connected to the first output pressure conduit and the at least one pitch chamber being connected to the second output pressure conduit. The pressure in the system chambers can then 5 be regulated separately from the pitch chamber pressure. The pressure in either or both of the first and second output pressure conduits may be determined by individual simple accumulators or regulated to a fixed or variable pressure. In that way the roll and pitch stiffness of the stiffness and damping system can be separately regulated.

10 In order to provide a centring force on the load distribution unit piston and rod assemblies, resilient centring devices may be used in either the system or pitch chambers.

15 The vehicle support means may be any known support means such as coil springs, air springs, torsion bars, leaf springs and rubber cones. The vehicle support means can, in the case of coil springs and air springs, be mounted around the wheel rams or mounted separately.

20 The accompanying drawings illustrate preferred embodiments of the present invention. Other embodiments are possible, and consequently the particularity of the accompanying drawings is not to be understood as superseding the generality of the preceding description of the invention. In the drawings:

Figure 1 is a schematic view of a first preferred embodiment of a hydraulic system having roll stiffness and roll and pitch damping, according to the present invention.

25 Figure 2 is a schematic view of a second preferred embodiment arrangement of a hydraulic system according to the present invention, being similar to the first arrangement, but with the addition of a pressure maintenance arrangement.

30 Figure 3 is a schematic view of a third preferred embodiment of a hydraulic system according to the present invention, having both stiffness and damping in both the roll and pitch modes.

Figure 4 is a schematic view of a fourth preferred embodiment of a hydraulic system according to the present invention, including valves to reduce or eliminate roll and pitch stiffness and damping; and

5 Figure 5 is a schematic view of a fifth preferred embodiment of a hydraulic system according to the present invention.

Referring initially to figure 1, there is shown a suspension system for a vehicle. Four wheel rams (11, 12, 13, 14) are located between the vehicle body (not shown) and four orthogonally disposed wheels (not shown) of the vehicle. Each wheel ram includes a cylinder (15, 16, 17, 18) connected to a wheel hub or 10 other suspension geometry to move with the wheel, a piston (19, 20, 21, 22) slidably housed within the cylinder, and a rod (23, 24, 25, 26) fixed between the piston and the body of the vehicle. The connection of the rod to the vehicle body may be by any known means, usually through a rubber bushing which in the case of MacPherson strut geometry usually includes a bearing.

15 For ease of understanding, the vehicle resilient support means are shown as "coil-overs", ie coil springs (27, 28, 29, 30) positioned around the wheel ram and located between a lower spring plate (31, 32, 33, 34) fixed to the cylinder and an upper spring plate (35, 36, 37, 38) which may be connected to the vehicle body or the rod (directly or indirectly such as via a bearing or bushing). It should 20 be understood that the resilient support means may be of any alternative known type such as for example air springs and may be located around the cylinder as shown with the coil springs or separate to the ram, which broadens the alternatives, for example, to torsion bars connected to the geometry providing wheel location.

25 The wheel rams are of basically conventional double-acting rams. Taking the front left wheel ram 11 as an example, the piston 19 (which may be formed as an integral part of the rod 23) has two grooves containing a bearing 39 and a seal 40. In some cases, the individual bearing and seal parts can be replaced by a single item (not shown) which may be bonded to or formed around the piston for 30 ease of assembly and low cost. The cylinder end (41) has three grooves containing a rod seal 42, a bearing 43 and a rod wiper 44 or other form of secondary seal such as an excluder. Each ram therefore has a compression

chamber (45, 46, 47, 48) and a rebound chamber (49, 50, 51, 52) formed by the piston (19, 20, 21, 22) within each cylinder (15, 16, 17, 18).

The four double-acting wheel rams are connected by a pair of diagonal circuits to provide passive decoupling of roll and pitch stiffness from heave 5 stiffness. The first diagonal circuit comprises two fluid volumes, a front left compression volume and a back right compression volume.

The front left compression volume includes the front left compression chamber 45, a front left compression conduit 61, a front left compression accumulator 69, a back right rebound conduit 67 and a back right rebound 10 chamber 51. The back right compression volume similarly includes a back right compression chamber 47, a back right compression conduit 63, a back right compression accumulator 71, a front left rebound conduit 65 and a front left rebound chamber 49.

The second diagonal circuit similarly comprises two fluid volumes, a front 15 right compression volume and a back left compression volume. The front right compression volume includes the front right compression chamber 46, a front right compression conduit 62, a front right compression accumulator 70, a back left rebound conduit 68 and a back left rebound chamber 52. The back left compression volume similarly includes a back left compression chamber 44, a 20 back left compression conduit 64, a back left compression accumulator 72, a front right rebound conduit 66 and a front right rebound chamber 50.

This simple diagonal connection arrangement would displace a compression chamber and the annular rebound chamber of the diagonally opposite wheel ram into each accumulator in roll and pitch, whereas in heave 25 only a rod volume (compression chamber minus annular rebound chamber) is displaced into the accumulator giving a higher roll and pitch stiffness than heave stiffness.

Between the first and second diagonal circuits is a load distribution unit 76 comprising four primary chambers (77, 78, 79, 80), each separated by a piston 30 (81, 82, 83, 84) including a piston seal (85, 86, 87, 88) into a system chamber (89, 90, 91, 92) and a pitch chamber (93, 94, 95, 96). The pistons are connected together in pairs by rods (97, 98) which have seals (99, 100) running on them to seal pitch chamber 93 from 96 and 94 from 95.

The front left system chamber 89 is connected to the front right compression conduit 61 and now forms part of the previously defined front left compression volume. Similarly, the front right system chamber 90 is connected to the front right compression conduit 62 and now forms part of the front right compression volume, the back right system chamber 91 is connected to the back right compression conduit 63 and now forms part of the back right compression volume, and finally, the back left system chamber 92 is connected to the back left compression conduit 64 and now forms part of the back left compression volume.

5

In roll, the rods (97, 98) react the pressure changes in the first and second 10 diagonal circuits, maintaining the roll stiffness of the hydraulic system. To remove the warp stiffness of the hydraulic system, the front left pitch chamber 93 is connected to the front right pitch chamber 94 by a passage 101 (the two front pitch chambers 93, 94 and the passage 101 together forming a front pitch volume), and the back right pitch chamber 95 is connected to the back left pitch 15 chamber 96 by a similar passage 102 (the two back pitch chambers 95, 96 and the passage 102 together forming a back pitch volume).

To remove the pitch stiffness of the hydraulic system, the front pitch chambers 93, 94 are connected to the back pitch chambers by a passage (103). In order to provide pitch damping in the hydraulic system, a damper valve 104 is 20 placed in the passage 103. The damper valve 104 can be a passive valve of any known type (shim tree stack, coil blow-off, etc) or may actually be, or simply incorporate a controlled variable restriction (the control being based on inputs from sensors for longitudinal acceleration and/or throttle and brake position). The maximum force available at the wheels, due to this pitch damping valve 104 is 25 limited by the pitch stiffness of the first and second diagonal circuits (which is related to the roll stiffness and therefore far higher than is ever desirable). This arrangement allows the pitch damping of the suspension to be set relatively independently of all other parameters, giving great freedom to achieve the optimum damping setting for a vehicle.

30 One preferred arrangement of the pitch damper valve 104 is a passive damper valve in parallel with a high flow switchable bypass valve which is controlled to be open in normal steady state running of the vehicle and closed while the vehicle is accelerating or braking. A more complex control can be used

if pitch acceleration or wheel positions are sensed to allow the valve to also be closed over wave inputs which are of the frequency that excites pitch of the vehicle body. When the bypass valve is in the open position, single wheel damping is reduced (as it is related to pitch damping), providing further comfort 5 gains and permitting the use of a more aggressive pitch damper valve if necessary to control pitch when the bypass valve is closed.

Damping of all motions of each wheel relative to the body can be achieved using dampers at the cylinders to damp the passage of fluid primarily out of (but can also be into) at least one of the chambers of each wheel ram. Restrictions 10 (105, 106, 107, 108) are shown on the front compression conduits for providing damping. These restrictions may act for fluid flow in both directions to provide compression and rebound damping. However, with typical system design parameters, it is preferable that the restrictions 105, 106, 107, 108 are compression dampers only, acting to restrict fluid flow in only the compression 15 direction with an intake (non-return) valve used in parallel to allow free flow of fluid into the compression chambers in rebound motions to prevent cavitation. Then rebound dampers (109, 110, 111, 112) are required which are similarly single acting, this time for rebound direction fluid flows, with an intake valve in parallel for free ingress of fluid into the rebound chamber in compression motions. 20 Of course, the rebound valves (109, 110, 111, 112) can be designed to provide similar or differential restrictions in both directions if required.

These wheel damper valves (105 to 112) can be integrated into the ram design or fitted as shown, on the conduits. They can be of any known form, and can be controlled to provide variable or switchable force vs. velocity curves.

25 Additional damper valves can be used between the system conduits and the accumulators to provide additional damping, primarily for roll and pitch motions of the vehicle. Again, although these valves are shown as simple restrictions, they may take the form of any known damper valve, including variable damper valves and may be switchable between comfort and handling 30 settings (or a switchable bypass may be used to reduce or eliminate their effect).

If the compression damper valves (105 to 109) are integrated into the wheel rams (11 to 14) then the accumulators (69 to 72) and the optional

accumulator damper valves (113 to 116) can also be integrated into the wheel rams.

As the hydraulic system is not the primary means of support (ie the coil springs - or air, etc. springs provide a large portion of the vehicle support) all of 5 the volumes in the system (the previously defined front and rear left and right compression volumes, and the front and back pitch volumes) can be operated at a common static pre-charge pressure. The advantage of operating all systems at the same static pre-charge pressure is that pressure differentials across piston seals throughout the system are eliminated and so therefore are attitude changes 10 caused by fluid leakage between the systems, and the need for a powered control system which can pump fluid between the volumes.

Although a powered control system using pump, valves, position sensors can be used if desired, figure 2 shows a preferred method of maintaining the average position of the load distribution unit pistons and the static pre-charge 15 pressure in the fluid volumes.

If the system volumes are all run at a common pressure and interconnected (albeit in a highly restricted manner), it is possible to maintain the centre position of the pistons in the load distribution unit using resilient devices to bias the pistons to a central position without the need for any sensors or powered 20 adjustment. The resilient devices add to the pitch, warp and single-wheel stiffnesses of the hydraulic system, so this should be borne in mind when selecting the stiffness of these springs. Coil springs are shown in figure 2 although any resilient device may be used.

The system chambers are connected via restrictions (145, 146, 147, 148) 25 to a common conduit or passage 151 which is in turn connected to a pressure maintenance device 152. The interconnected front and back pitch volumes only require a single heavily damped connection to the pressure maintenance device 152, shown as the restriction 149, also connected to the common conduit or passage 151. Each restriction is typically a micro orifice with filters either side to 30 prevent blockage, although any known restrictive means may be used. The orifice is sized to provide the characteristics required to maintain the pressures in the system volumes within an acceptable range whilst preventing significant fluid

loss during cornering to maintain the static roll attitude within an acceptable range when returning to straight line running.

Although the pressure maintenance device 152 may be omitted, changes in the volumes of fluid and gas in the hydraulic system and its accumulators 5 through the operating temperature range of the vehicle are usually large enough to require some form of compensation device. The complexity of this device can vary significantly, depending on the design parameters and the functionality required.

In its simplest form, the pressure maintenance device (152) can be a 10 simple accumulator with any known construction (for example bladder-type with gas spring, piston-type with gas spring or with mechanical spring).

Alternatively the pressure maintenance device (152) can use a fluid pressure source (such as a tank with a pump, or another vehicle system such as the power steering) to maintain the pressure in the hydraulic suspension volumes 15 to either a fixed or a variable pressure. If a fixed pressure is chosen, the components required can be simple, cheap, passive, mechanical parts, however as the system temperature changes, the system stiffness will change slightly. To maintain the system stiffness characteristics constant with varying temperature, the pressure in the systems must be adjusted in dependence on their 20 temperature.

Also, the roll stiffness of the hydraulic suspension system can be adjusted by changing the pressure in the systems, so if a pressure maintenance device (152) with variable pressure set-points is used, the pressure can be varied in dependence on the load in the vehicle and/or by a driver operated mode selector 25 or a variable selector.

Figure 3 shows an alternative arrangement of the hydraulic suspension system. The passage 103 connecting the pitch volumes has been removed and each pitch volume is now connected via a passage or conduit (181, 182) to a respective accumulator (183, 184). This arrangement provides a pitch stiffness, 30 determined by the cylinder sizes and the gas volume in each accumulator. Therefore, the pitch stiffness can be set very low. One advantage of this arrangement over the version in figures 1 and 2 is that the diameter of the primary chambers (77, 78, 79, 80) in the load distribution unit can be used to set the roll

moment distribution (or contribute to it). In figures 1 and 2, the diameter of the cylinders (15, 16, 17, 18) of the wheel rams is the main tuning parameter available (along with the mechanical advantage of the wheel rams, etc) to enable the roll moment distribution of the system to be set. The pistons (81, 82, 83, 84) 5 in the load distribution unit are all of the same diameter, as the fluid used in the pitch chambers is reasonably incompressible, so the front to rear volumes must match (although see additional notes below). If the pistons in the load distribution unit are all of the same diameter, then to proportion the force changes in a typical greater than 50% distribution between the front and rear wheel rams in roll, the 10 diameter of the front cylinders (15, 16) must be larger than the diameter of the rear cylinders (17, 18). Then when the pressure is balanced through the load distribution unit rods and pistons, the larger front cylinder diameter gives a larger front cylinder force. However, when the vehicle roll moment distribution is 15 extreme (can be over 80%), the diameter of the front cylinders (15, 16) becomes extreme compared to the diameter of the back cylinders (17, 18). This causes large volumes of fluid to be moved to and from the front wheel rams with front wheel motion, leading to undesirable ram forces due to fluid mass acceleration effects. This can be overcome by sizing the front and rear cylinders (15, 16 and 17, 18) to have a more similar diameter and changing the roll moment distribution 20 of the hydraulic system using the load distribution unit. In figure 3, the front primary chambers (77, 78) have a smaller diameter than the rear primary chambers (79, 80). This means that in roll, for the load distribution unit rods and pistons to be balanced, the pressure in the front compression volumes must be higher than the pressure in the back compression volumes, giving the required 25 direction in roll moment distribution. The load distribution unit can be sized to provide the entire bias required for the design roll moment distribution for the hydraulic system, or a portion of the bias, with the wheel cylinder diameters being used to make up the rest of the bias required, or the wheel cylinders can be used to provide the entire bias required, with the load distribution unit having similar 30 diameter chambers all round.

It should be noted that an accumulator could be used on the passage 103 in figures 1 and 2, with two single acting damper valves, one between the accumulator and the front pitch volume, damping fluid flowing out of the front

pitch volume, and one between the accumulator and the back pitch volume damping fluid flowing out of the back pitch volume. Then differential bores can be used between the front primary chambers (77, 78) and the back primary chambers (79, 80) to adjust roll moment distribution as described above.

5 Returning to the arrangement shown in figure 3, pitch damping is provided by damper valves in the conduits (181, 182) between the two pitch volumes and their respective accumulators (183, 184). Again, preferably these damper valves are single-acting, providing restriction in the compression direction for each 10 accumulators (ie they act to restrict fluid flow out of the pitch volumes into the accumulators and have relatively free flowing 'intake valves' to allow fluid to freely flow out of the accumulators back into the pitch volumes. These valves can be of any known construction and can be switchable or provide variable damping curves.

15 The pressure maintenance arrangement shown in figure 2 can be easily and obviously adapted to include a restricted connection to the back pitch volume as it is not longer in communication with the front pitch volume. Alternatively, the pitch volumes can be maintained at a different pressure to the front and back, left and right system volumes. Then the roll stiffness could be controlled by controlling pressure in the four system volumes and the pitch stiffness could be 20 controlled separately by controlling the pressure in the two pitch volumes.

An alternative method of changing the roll and/or pitch stiffness is to use additional accumulators. For roll, accumulators can be located on the two front, the two rear, or all four compression volumes. For pitch, additional accumulators can be added to either or both of the front and back pitch volumes. In all cases, 25 the accumulators can be connected to the hydraulic system through switchable lockout valves. This allows for the roll and/or pitch stiffness to be switched between a high and a low setting. These settings are generally either side of a multi purpose single setting, so that the system can provide improved handling and control with high stiffness and improved comfort with low stiffness, as 30 selected or controlled automatically by any know means (acceleration sensors, throttle and brake sensors, position sensors, etc). An alternative to hydraulically switching a whole accumulator in and out of the systems, is to use an accumulator design with two gas volumes, then simpler, cheaper gas switching

valves can be used to vary the gas volumes available to the systems by switching the lock-out valve to between the two gas volumes to isolate one of the volumes.

A further alternative method to switch the roll and/or pitch stiffness is to employ 'bridging valves' which connect at least two of the system or pitch 5 volumes together, as shown in figure 4.

Pitch interconnection valve 191 interconnects the front and back pitch volumes together to remove the pitch stiffness as in figures 1 and 2. This pitch interconnect valve 191 may be a simple lockout valve to remove the pitch stiffness and damping to give the optimum comfort levels, or it may include a 10 damper valve in series with the lockout valve to damp the interconnection. Alternatively, it may be a controlled variable damper valve or even just a passive damper valve. The control of the lockout valve or variable damper valve needs to sense vehicle parameters to ensure that the hydraulic system is stiff in pitch during accelerating, braking or wave-induced pitch motions, and that the system 15 is soft in pitch (and therefore provides improved single-wheel comfort) during normal running of the vehicle. It could be a mechanical or electrical arrangement, sensitive to longitudinal acceleration, brake or throttle position. Alternatively, it could be electronic, sensing pitch motions using accelerometers and/or wheel positions, instead of, or in addition to, or alternatively sensing longitudinal 20 acceleration, brake or throttle position.

Roll interconnection valve 192 is shown interconnecting the two front compression conduits (61, 62) of the hydraulic system. This removes a large component of the roll stiffness and roll damping of the hydraulic system as, not only can the front compression volumes freely exchange fluid, removing the roll 25 stiffness and damping (normally due to the accumulators 69, 70 and their damper valves 113, 114) but the back compression volumes can exchange fluid through the load distribution unit piston and rod assemblies (81, 97, 84 and 82, 98, 83) moving (as if reacting to a warp motion) and transferring fluid through the front compression conduits and the roll interconnection valve 192. To reduce the flow 30 path required for the fluid from the back compression volumes, a similar roll interconnection valve may be provided between the back compression conduits. Either way the roll stiffness and damping due to the rear compression

accumulators 71, 72 and their damper valves 115, 116 is also partially or substantially removed.

The roll interconnection valve(s) can be located anywhere between the front (and/or rear) compression volumes. For example, the valve 192 can be 5 designed into the load distribution unit (76), interconnecting the front compression system chambers 89, 90.

As with the pitch interconnection valve, the roll interconnection valve(s) can be a lockout valve or variable restriction. The control can be mechanical or electrical, sensitive to lateral acceleration or steering wheel position. Ideally the 10 control is electronic, sensing steering angle and/or steering velocity, vehicle speed and lateral acceleration.

Although figure 4 shows differential bores in the load distribution unit, obviously the same diameter bore can be used front and rear if desired.

Single-acting rams can be used at all four wheels, but the roll stiffness and 15 damping available is very limited. However, in the case of extreme roll moment distributions (70% upwards or an even broader range, depending upon vehicle stiffness and geometry parameters) it can be beneficial to use single-acting rams at one end of the vehicle. Double-acting rams are retained at the end of the vehicle requiring higher change in roll loads. With the single-acting rams, the 20 rebound conduits are deleted. Ideally the pistons are used as damper valves to provide sufficient rebound damping for control.

The connection sequence of the hydraulic rams to the load distribution unit is the same in all of figures 1 to 4. However, as is obvious to any person skilled in the art, the connection sequence can be changed to produce similar functionality. 25 The connecting passages 101 and 102 may need to be moved to suit. For example, the system chambers can all be in the two forward primary chambers (77, 78), either side of the two pistons 81 and 82, with the pitch chambers being in the other two primary chambers (79, 80) either side of pistons 83 and 84. Alternatively, the system and pitch chamber locations could be reversed from the 30 layout shown in figures 1 to 4.

Figure 5 shows an alternate connection sequence of the hydraulic rams to the load distribution unit. In figures 3 and 4, if the pitch accumulators (183, 184) were infinitely stiff, the pitch stiffness of the hydraulic system would be

determined by the roll stiffness. However for normal road vehicle suspension set up, the pitch stiffness is usually less than the roll stiffness, so the compliance provided by the pitch accumulators (183, 184) permits a pitch stiffness of below or up to the roll stiffness. However, on some vehicles such as race cars with 5 aerodynamic aids, control of pitch attitude can be very important. In this case, the hydraulic system can be effectively rotated through ninety degrees as shown in Figure 5. This arrangement permits the hydraulic system to provide a high pitch stiffness with a lower heave stiffness, zero warp stiffness and a roll stiffness between the heave and warp stiffness.

10 The construction of the LDU is similar to in the previous figures. Although all system chambers 201-204 are shown of equal diameter, it is possible to change the roll moment distribution of the hydraulic system by using different diameter system chambers front (201, 202) to rear (203, 204). The front left system chamber 201 is connected to the front left compression conduit 61, the 15 front right compression chamber is connected to the front right compression conduit, the back right system chamber is connected to the back right compression conduit and the back left system chamber is connected to the back right compression conduit. This rotating of the LDU through ninety degrees has effectively turned the pitch chambers of previous arrangements into roll chambers 20 205-208. The two left roll chambers (205, 208) are interconnected by a passage 209 and the two right roll chambers (206, 207) are interconnected by a passage 210. The two left roll chambers are also connected by a passage 211 to a left roll accumulator 213, via a left roll damper valve 215. Similarly, the two right roll chambers are connected by a passage 212 to a right roll accumulator 214, via a 25 right roll damper valve 216.

THE CLAIMS DEFINING THE INVENTION ARE AS FOLLOWS

1. A damping and stiffness system for a vehicle suspension system for a vehicle, the vehicle including a vehicle body and a first pair and a second pair of diagonally spaced wheel assemblies, the first pair of diagonally spaced wheel assemblies including at least one front left wheel assembly and at least one back right wheel assembly, the second pair of diagonally spaced wheel assemblies including at least one front right wheel assembly and at least one back left wheel assembly, the vehicle suspension system also including front and rear vehicle resilient support means between the vehicle body and the wheel assemblies for 5 resiliently supporting the vehicle above the wheel assemblies, the damping and 10 stiffness system including:

at least one wheel ram located between each wheel assembly and the vehicle body, each ram including at least a compression chamber;

15 a load distribution unit interconnected between the compression chambers of the front left, front right, back left and back right wheel rams, the load distribution unit including first and second piston rod assemblies, first, second, third and fourth system volumes and first and second modal resilience volumes,

20 the first piston rod assembly defining first, second, third and fourth effective areas, the second piston rod assembly defining fifth, sixth, seventh and eighth effective areas, the first and second piston rod assemblies being located within the load distribution unit such that each piston rod assembly can rotate about and slide along a major axis of the piston rod assembly,

25 the first effective area defines a movable wall of the first system volume such that as the first piston rod assembly slides along its major axis, the volume of the first system volume varies, the second effective area defines a moveable wall of the second system volume, the third effective area defines a movable wall of the first modal resilience volume, the fourth effective area defines a movable wall of the second modal resilience volume, the fifth effective area defines a movable wall of the third system volume such that as the second piston rod 30 assembly slides along its major axis, the volume of the third system volume varies, the sixth effective area defines a moveable wall of the fourth system volume, the seventh effective area defines a movable wall of the first modal

resilience volume, and the eighth effective area defines a movable wall of the second modal resilience volume,

the first system volume increasing in volume proportionately to the decrease in volume of the second system volume with motion of the first piston rod assembly, the third system volume increasing in volume proportionately to the decrease in volume of the fourth system volume with motion of the second piston rod assembly,

the volume of the first modal resilience volume decreasing proportionately to the increase in volume of the first and third system volumes with motion of the first and second piston rod assemblies, the volume of the second modal resilience volume decreasing proportionately to the increase in volume of the second and fourth system volumes,

the first and fourth system volumes being connected to the compression chambers of the wheel rams associated with one of the pairs of diagonally spaced wheel assemblies, the second and third system volumes being connected to the compression chambers of the wheel rams associated with the other pair of diagonally spaced wheel assemblies, the damping and stiffness system thereby providing substantially zero warp stiffness; and

wherein the vehicle is primarily supported by the vehicle resilient support means.

2. A damping and stiffness system according to claim 1 further including a pressure maintenance device connected to the first, second, third and fourth system volumes to maintain the static pressure of said system volumes at a substantially common pressure.

25 3. A damping and stiffness system as claimed in claim 2 wherein the pressure maintenance device is further connected to the first and second modal stiffness volumes to maintain the static pressure of the modal resilience volumes at substantially the same common pressure.

30 4. A damping and stiffness system as claimed in claim 1 wherein the first system volume is connected to the compression chamber of the at least one

wheel ram associated with the at least one front left wheel assembly, the second system volume is connected to the compression chamber of the at least one wheel ram associated with the at least one back left wheel assembly, the third system volume is connected to the compression chamber of the at least one 5 wheel ram associated with the at least one front right wheel assembly and the fourth system volumes is connected to the compression chamber of the at least one wheel ram associated with the at least one back right wheel assembly,

the first modal resilience volume thereby being a front bump resilience volume and the second modal resilience volume thereby being a back bump 10 resilience volume, the front and back bump resilience volumes thereby providing the damping and stiffness system with additional pitch resilience, independent of the roll and heave stiffness of the damping and stiffness system.

5. A damping and stiffness system as claimed in claim 1 wherein the first system volume is connected to the compression chamber of the at least one 15 wheel ram associated with the at least one front left wheel assembly, the second system volume is connected to the compression chamber of the at least one wheel ram associated with the at least one front right wheel assembly, the third system volume is connected to the compression chamber of the at least one wheel ram associated with the at least one back left wheel assembly and the 20 fourth system volume is connected to the compression chamber of the at least one wheel ram associated with the at least one back right wheel assembly,

the first modal resilience volume thereby being a left roll resilience volume and the second modal resilience volume thereby being a right roll resilience volume; the left and right roll resilience volumes thereby providing the damping 25 and stiffness system with additional roll resilience, independent of the pitch and heave stiffness of the damping and stiffness system.

6. A damping and stiffness system as claimed in claim 1 wherein
the load distribution unit, includes a first pair of axially aligned primary 30 chambers and a second pair of axially aligned primary chambers, each primary chamber including a piston separating each primary chamber into two secondary chambers, a first rod connecting the pistons of the two first primary chambers,

forming a first piston rod assembly and a second rod connecting the pistons of the two second primary chambers forming a second piston rod assembly,

5 one of the secondary chambers in the first pair of primary chambers being a first front system chamber and being connected to the compression chamber of a front wheel ram on a first side of the vehicle,

the other secondary chamber in the first pair of primary chambers which varies in volume in the same direction as the first front system chamber with motion of the first piston rod assembly, being a first back pitch chamber,

10 one of the secondary chambers in the first pair of primary chambers which varies in volume in the opposite direction as the first front system chamber with motion of the first piston rod assembly being a first back system chamber and being connected to the compression chamber of a back wheel ram on a first side of the vehicle,

15 the other secondary chamber in the first pair of primary chambers which varies in volume in the same direction as the first back system chamber with motion of the first piston rod assembly, being a first front pitch chamber,

one of the secondary chambers in the second pair of primary chambers being a second front system chamber and being connected to the compression chamber of a front wheel ram on a second side of the vehicle,

20 the other secondary chamber in the second pair of primary chambers which varies in volume in the same direction as the second front system chamber with motion of the second piston rod assembly, being a second back pitch chamber,

25 one of the secondary chambers in the second pair of primary chambers which varies in volume in the opposite direction as the second front system chamber with motion of the second piston rod assembly being a second back system chamber and being connected to the compression chamber of a back wheel ram on a second side of the vehicle,

30 the other secondary chamber in the second pair of primary chambers which varies in volume in the same direction as the second back system chamber with motion of the second piston rod assembly, being a second front pitch chamber, and

the first and second front pitch chambers being interconnected forming a front pitch volume and the first and second back pitch chambers being interconnected forming a back pitch volume.

7. A damping and stiffness system as claimed in claim 1, wherein
 - 5 the load distribution unit, includes a first pair of axially aligned primary chambers and a second pair of axially aligned primary chambers, each primary chamber including a piston separating each primary chamber into two secondary chambers, a first rod connecting the pistons of the two first primary chambers, forming a first piston rod assembly and a second rod connecting the pistons of
 - 10 the two second primary chambers forming a second piston rod assembly,
 - one of the secondary chambers in the first pair of primary chambers being a front left system chamber and being connected to the compression chamber of a front wheel ram on a left side of the vehicle,
 - 15 the other secondary chamber in the first pair of primary chambers which varies in volume in the same direction as the front system chamber with motion of the first piston rod assembly, being a first right roll chamber,
 - 20 one of the secondary chambers in the first pair of primary chambers which varies in volume in the opposite direction to the front left system chamber with motion of the first piston rod assembly being a front right system chamber and being connected to the compression chamber of the other front wheel ram on a right side of the vehicle,
 - 25 the other secondary chamber in the first pair of primary chambers which varies in volume in the same direction as the front right system chamber with motion of the first piston rod assembly, being a first left roll chamber,
 - 30 one of the secondary chambers in the second pair of primary chambers being a back left system chamber and being connected to the compression chamber of a back wheel ram on the left side of the vehicle,
 - the other secondary chamber in the second pair of primary chambers which varies in volume in the same direction as the back left system chamber with motion of the second piston rod assembly, being a second right roll chamber,
 - 35 one of the secondary chambers in the second pair of primary chambers which varies in volume in the opposite direction as the second front system

chamber with motion of the second piston rod assembly being a back right system chamber and being connected to the compression chamber of a back wheel ram on the right side of the vehicle,

the other secondary chamber in the second pair of primary chambers
5 which varies in volume in the same direction as the back right system chamber with motion of the second piston rod assembly, being a second left roll chamber, and

the first and second left roll chambers being interconnected forming a left roll volume and the first and second right roll chambers being interconnected
10 forming a right roll volume.

8. A damping and stiffness system as claimed in claim 6 or claim 7 wherein the wheel rams of at least the two front or the two rear wheel rams are single-acting rams.

9. A damping and stiffness system as claimed in claim 8 wherein each single-
15 acting wheel ram includes a piston dividing the ram into a compression and a rebound chamber, damping being provided in the piston of the ram to provide at least a rebound damping force.

10. A damping and stiffness system according to claim 8 wherein the wheel rams at one end of the vehicle are double-acting wheel rams further including a
20 rebound chamber, the rebound chamber of each double-acting wheel ram being connected to the compression chamber of the diagonally opposite wheel ram.

11. A damping and stiffness system according to claim 6 or 7 wherein each wheel ram is a double-acting ram further including a rebound chamber, the rebound chamber of each double-acting wheel ram being connected to the
25 compression chamber of the diagonally opposite wheel ram.

12. A damping and stiffness system according to any of the preceding claims wherein the compression chamber of each of at least two of said wheel rams may be in fluid communication with a respective accumulator.

13. A damping and stiffness system as claimed in claim 6 wherein the front pitch volume is connected to the back pitch volume through a pitch valve arrangement.
14. A damping and stiffness system according to claim 13 wherein the pitch valve arrangement includes at least one pitch damper valve to provide pitch damping.
15. A damping and stiffness system according to claim 14 wherein the at least one pitch damper valve is a variable damper valve.
16. A damping and stiffness system according to claim 14 wherein the pitch valve arrangement further includes a bypass passage and a bypass valve, the bypass passage being connected to either side of the at least one pitch damper valve, the bypass valve being located in the bypass passage and being switchable to enable or disable the pitch damping.
17. A damping and stiffness system according to claim 6 wherein the front pitch volume is connected to a front pitch accumulator through a front pitch damper valve and the back pitch volume may be connected to a back pitch accumulator through a back pitch damper valve, the front and back pitch accumulators provide additional pitch resilience in the stiffness and damping system.
18. A damping and stiffness system according to claim 17 wherein at least one of the front and rear pitch damper valves is a variable damper valve.
19. A damping and stiffness system according to claim 17 or 18 wherein the front pitch volume is connected to the back pitch volume by a pitch stiffness valve.
20. A damping and stiffness system as claimed in claim 19 wherein the pitch stiffness valve is a damper valve.

21. A damping and stiffness system as claimed in claim 19 wherein the pitch stiffness valve is a lockout valve to isolate the front pitch volume from the back pitch volume.
22. A damping and stiffness system according to claim 6 wherein a roll valve is 5 provided to interconnect the compression chambers of the at least two front wheel rams.
23. A damping and stiffness system according to claim 6 wherein a roll valve is provided to interconnect the compression chambers of the at least two back wheel rams.
- 10 24. A damping and stiffness system according to claim 6 or 7 further including a pressure maintenance device connected to at least four of the secondary chambers in the load distribution unit by respective pressure maintenance passages.
- 15 25. A damping and stiffness system according to claim 24 further including a valve in each pressure maintenance passage.
26. A damping and stiffness system according to claim 24 further including a restriction in each pressure maintenance passage.
27. A damping and stiffness system as claimed in claim 24 wherein the pressure maintenance device includes a fluid pressure source.
- 20 28. A damping and stiffness system as claimed in claim 24 or 27 wherein the pressure maintenance device includes an accumulator.
29. A damping and stiffness system according to claim 27 wherein the pressure maintenance unit is controlled to regulate the static pressure in the at least four secondary chambers to a preset pressure.

30. A damping and stiffness system according to claim 29 wherein the preset pressure can be varied.

31. A damping and stiffness system according to claim 6 further including a pressure maintenance device, the pressure maintenance device including a first 5 and a second output pressure, the first output pressure being connected to the first front, second front, first back and second back system chambers of the load distribution unit by respective system pressure maintenance passages, the second output pressure being connected to the front pitch volume and the back pitch volume by respective pitch pressure maintenance passages.

10 32. A damping and stiffness system according to claim 31 wherein the pressure maintenance device includes a fluid pressure source, the pressure in the system chambers being controlled to a first preset pressure, the pressure in the pitch volumes being controlled to a second preset pressure, the first preset pressure being variable to vary the roll stiffness of the damping and stiffness 15 system separately to the pitch stiffness, the second preset pressure being variable to vary the pitch stiffness of the damping and stiffness system.

33. A damping and stiffness system according to any of the preceding claims further including resilient centring devices to provide a centring force on the piston rod assemblies in the load distribution unit to bias the piston rod assemblies 20 towards a mid-stroke position.

DATED this 20th day of December 2004

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